

Westcliff 12 Leicester Lions 19

With Jim Smith and Dartnell remaining unavailable since the opening day of the season further changes were forced upon Westcliff through the absences of Anderson-Brown, Koomson, Whiting, Rossouw, Jones, Rob Smith and Buster Reynolds. This facilitated a series of positional switches and returns to the match day squad for Hogarth, Kwassi, and for the first time this season, Webster and Mckeith. Starting debuts were also handed to Aaron James and Sean Triana.

Conditions were much the same as for the previous 2 weeks with the sun bearing down on a hard pitch desperate for some much-needed rain. The game started at a pace with both sides committed and vigorously competitive. The open exchanges were even and each side in turn carried the contest to the other but neither side were able to take early advantage. After 15 minutes though it was the visitors who broke the deadlock having moved one way across the field off a lineout they then came back the way they had come and a midfield break got them behind the defensive line and allowed an offload to their winger who was able to cross the whitewash and round to the posts. The conversion successful the Lions enjoyed a 0-7 lead. Westcliff went on the front foot and applied pressure of their own but strong defence kept them at arm's length for several minutes until after leaking a series of penalties the referee invited the Lions no 8 to take a 10-minute breather. Further try line pressure followed and within a few minutes the extra man had been made to count as Vandermolten crashed over under the posts and Bannister levelled the scores off the tee. The game continued in much the same vein, fairly even, fully committed, absorbing rather than thrilling. As the half closed Leicester took their turn at a series of short-range drives which eventually allowed their second row to get over and give them a 7-12 lead.

In each of their previous two games Westcliff had conceded a score in the opening minute or two of the second half, unfortunately, they did so again and the manner of it was disappointing. They fielded an exit kick and sent a return cross field kick back into the opposition 22. The kick though was collected and run back by the winger who evaded 3 would be tacklers before offloading to the support on his shoulder as he reached the home 22. The defence scrambled but was outflanked and the ball was shifted back to the winger who was able to cross the whitewash and score under the posts. The visitors now had a 12-point lead in a very tight game to defend, and defend it they did, often absorbing long periods of sustained pressure while also breaking from time to time and threatening to make the game safe without quite doing so. As the game progressed and entered the final stages that defence took a few too many liberties and the yellow card came back out, not once, but twice, and Westcliff got their reward with a try for debutant Triana. Now within a score at 12-19 the hosts had one more chance to level the scores and for a moment it seemed possible, even likely, as they broke from deep with supporting runners taking the ball behind the defence, but the cover scrambled and man and ball were ultimately bundled into touch and the game came to a conclusion.

Another game that got away from us and in which we didn't quite do enough. Its fair to say that so far, we have been competitive but have not quite managed the key moments as well as we need to. It's perhaps understandable that a squad new to the level that has been overhauled in key areas will take a little time to operate to the optimum especially with a new coaching team at the reins. The flip side of that is the significant room for improvement that exists. Working hard and getting better whilst coping with the inevitable injuries and unavailability's is our key focus going forward.

James, Triana, Bannister, Bolton, Hogarth, Croft, H Marrant, Weston, B Marrant, Binneman, Scogings, Vandermolten, Webber, Marsh, Reynolds REP Dellas, Binstead, Webster, Kwaasi, Mckeith